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| Anton Shammas (1950 –) |
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| Anton Shammas is a Palestinian poet, novelist, academic, and translator. He is best known for his 1986 novel ערבסקות/*Arabeskot* (*Arabesques*), the first high-profile novel written by a Palestinian in the Hebrew language. Shammas' literary career – as a writer, translator, and scholar – has largely focused on themes of Palestinian and Israeli identity, and the relationship of such identities to language and translation. |
| Anton Shammas is a Palestinian poet, novelist, academic, and translator. He is best known for his 1986 novel ערבסקות/*Arabeskot* (*Arabesques*), the first high-profile novel written by a Palestinian in the Hebrew language. Shammas' literary career – as a writer, translator, and scholar – has largely focused on themes of Palestinian and Israeli identity, and the relationship of such identities to language and translation.  Anton Shammas was born in 1950 in the village of Fassuta in the northern Galilee to a Palestinian father and a Lebanese mother who had moved south of the border to work as a schoolteacher. The family moved to Haifa in 1962, and Shammas then headed to Jerusalem, where he studied English and Arabic literature and art history at Hebrew University from 1968-72. He left Israel in 1987, moving to the USA, where he has occupied a number of academic positions, including Professor of Middle Eastern Literature at the University of Michigan.  File: Anton Shammas in conversation  Figure 1 Anton Shammas in conversation with Khaled Mattawa at University of Michigan, discussing Mattawa's book on Mahmoud Darwish  Source: <http://leccap.engin.umich.edu/leccap/view/gallery1-qs62mnczzu/33646>  Shammas' literary activities started in Israel in the 1970s. He was one of the founders of the Arabic-language magazine *al-Sharq* ( الشرق/*The East*), which he edited from 1971 to 1976. He also published three collections of poems between 1974 and 1979, two in Hebrew and one in Arabic, and wrote articles which – amongst other subjects – delved into the question of Arab identity in a Jewish state. From 1972 until 1984 Shammas also translated a number of Hebrew books into Arabic, but in the early 1980s his interest appeared to shift to presenting Arabic literature to Hebrew readerships. In 1984 he published the Hebrew edition of one of the best-known novels by a Palestinian author, Emil Habiby's *The Secret Life of Saeed the Pessoptimist* (الوقائع الغريبة في اختفاء سعيد أبي النحس المتشائل‎ / *Al-Waqa'i al ghareebah fi ikhtifa' Sa'id Abi an-Nahs al-Mutashaa'il*, originally published in 1974), and followed this with *Ikhtiyyeh* ( إخطية ) in 1988 and *Saraya, the Ogre's Daughter* (خرافية سرايا بنت الغول / *Khurrafeyyat Sarayah Bint al-Ghoul*) in 1993. Apart from *Arabesques*, Anton Shammas is best known for his Hebrew translations of Habiby.  In 1986, though, Shammas published *Arabesques* (ערבסקות /*Arabeskot*), the first significant novel in Hebrew by a Palestinian author (the absolute first was Atallah Mansour's *Be-or hadash*, in 1966). it was acclaimed by Israeli critics, with Amos Oz calling it ‘a triumph, not necessarily for the Israeli society, but for the Hebrew language’ and Yael Lotan claiming it as the first Israeli (rather than Jewish) novel because ‘is based entirely on Israeli experience’. The novel's English translation also had a considerable impact on publication, receiving lengthy reviews in major literary journals, appearing in 'best of the year' lists and ultimately being translated into at least eight languages. Western literary critics also welcomed its combination of technical prowess and its subtle and complex navigation of the issue of identity in Israeli society.  File: University of Michigan faculty page  Figure 2 From University of Michigan faculty page  Source: <http://www.lsa.umich.edu/neareast/people/faculty/ci.shammasanton_ci.detail>  *Arabesques* was seen as a novel which displayed virtuosity in terms of Hebrew literary style, but was also recognised as challenging conceptions of what it means to be 'Israeli', since these are often closed wrapped up with Jewish identities. Lotan also suggested that Shammas might ultimately take on a stature in Hebrew literature like that of, for instance, Joseph Conrad in English – the non-native speaker of the language who nevertheless surpasses almost all others in terms of their command of it. But Muhammad Siddiq – like Shammas a Palestinian citizen of Israel – has argued that for Arab writers to be genuinely seen as part of the Israeli canon will necessitate major social and attitudinal changes.  In the wake of the success of *Arabesques*, Shammas moved to the USA and spent much of the rest of his career at the University of Michigan, whilst also working with various other organisations and publications, including the International Parliament of Writers, of which he was a founding member, and editorial roles at the *Journal of Palestine Studies* and *Banipal*, a magazine focusing on translations of Arabic literature into English.  File: Current edition of Arabesques  Figure 3 Current edition of Arabesques (in English/USA) – University of California Press  Source: <http://www.ucpress.edu/book.php?isbn=9780520228320>  Anton Shammas continued also to translate literature to and from Arabic, Hebrew and English. This has included adapting plays by Dario Fo, Samuel Beckett, Harold Pinter, Edward Albee, and Athol Fugard for Israeli theatre companies (in both Arabic and Hebrew). In 2006, he released a Hebrew edition of the poems of Taha Muhammad Ali – like Emil Habiby and Shammas himself a Palestinian from the Galilee region of northern Israel. This, along with Shammas' editorial involvement in the 2002 Hebrew edition of Elias Khoury's monumental Arabic novel *Gate of the Sun* ( باب الشمس/ *Bab al-shams*), a layered and complex intertwining of the establishment of the State of Israel with the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon, highlight the continuity within Shammas' work – a focus on the experience of Palestinians within Israel, the complex challenges which their existence poses to Israeli identity, and the role of literature and translation in negotiating such challenges. PublicationsProse *The Biggest Liar in the World* (children's, Hebrew) (1982)  ערבסקות / *Arabeskot* / *Arabesques*. 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| Further reading:  (Bernard)  (Brenner)  (Levy)  (Siddiq) |